

WHAT IMPACT DOES POLITICAL PARTY CONTROL HAVE ON HOMELESSNESS?

By Doug Marshall, President, Hope for the Homeless Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This analysis asks a straightforward question: **Does long-term one-party control of a state's governorship affect homelessness outcomes?** In theory it should. Governors set priorities, appoint agency leadership, shape budgets, and influence enforcement and program design. When the same party holds the governorship for multiple election cycles, those choices compound and become embedded in policy.

METHOD

I grouped the **50 states plus Washington, D.C.** into three categories based on gubernatorial outcomes over the **last four election cycles**:

- **Blue:** Democratic governors in all four cycles (10 states)
- **Red:** Republican governors in all four cycles (19 states)
- **Purple:** mixed party/independent outcomes (22 states)

For each state (and D.C.), I used **HUD's 2007–2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) estimates** from the **2024 AHAR: Part 1** for homeless counts in **2007** and **2024**, and paired those with **2007 and 2024 population estimates** to calculate homelessness **per 10,000 residents**. I then calculated a **population-weighted average** for each group by summing homeless counts and population within each group and converting to a per-10,000 rate—so large states appropriately influence the group result more than small states.¹

What We Can Conclude

- States with **Democratic governors over the last four election cycles** have **substantially higher homelessness rates per capita**, and those rates **rose materially** from 2007 to 2024.
- States with **Republican governors over the last four election cycles** saw an **overall decline** in homelessness rates per capita over the same period.

This does **not** prove party control “causes” homelessness. But the pattern is large, consistent, and persistent enough to be a legitimate signal—especially because governors have real policy levers that plausibly influence homelessness outcomes.

Oregon as a Cautionary Case: Policies That Likely Increased Homelessness Unintentionally

Oregon illustrates how long-running policy decisions can compound:

- **Loss of inpatient psychiatric capacity** (e.g., closure of Dammasch without adequate replacement).
- **Weakened ability to enforce basic public-space standards**, including ongoing constraints under **ORS 195.530 (HB 3115)** even after **Grants Pass Supreme Court ruling**.⁸
- **Measure 110’s decriminalization model**, which removed consequences before treatment/accountability systems were ready.⁹
- **Erosion of “treatment-or-jail” leverage** as possession-driven drug court pathways collapsed.
- **Public defender crisis**, disrupting low-level enforcement and reducing leverage to compel engagement.
- **Civil commitment constraints + insufficient inpatient capacity**, leaving the sickest cycling street/ER/jail.

CONCLUSION

The takeaway is not that party labels magically create homelessness. The takeaway is that **governance choices compound**. Over nearly two decades, states with sustained one-party gubernatorial control show markedly different homelessness outcomes, and it is reasonable to hypothesize that **policy regimes and enforcement/treatment structures** contribute to those differences. Oregon’s experience underscores the risk of removing accountability, reducing treatment capacity, and weakening public standards—all while expecting homelessness to improve. If Oregon wants better outcomes, it must rebuild the stabilization pipeline: **more treatment capacity (including secure and inpatient options), restored leverage to compel engagement when warranted, and clear public-space standards that are enforced consistently**.

WHAT IMPACT DOES POLITICAL PARTY CONTROL HAVE ON HOMELESSNESS?

Does long-term one-party control of a state’s governorship affect homelessness? It should—at least in theory. Political parties campaign on how they will run the state, and the governor sets priorities, directs agencies, and appoints key officials who will carry out that agenda. When the same party holds the governor’s office for multiple election cycles, those priorities don’t just stay talking points—they shape budgets, enforcement, regulations, and program design, and over time they harden into policy and law.

To test this theory, I divided the 50 states and the District of Columbia into one of three categories:

- **Blue States** – States where Democrats have won the gubernatorial race for the past four election cycles.
- **Red States** – States where Republicans have won the gubernatorial race for the past four election cycles.
- **Purple States** – States where neither political party has dominated the governorship for the past four election cycles.

Political Party Control Over Governorships Last Four Election Cycles

BLUE STATES – 10

California
Colorado
Connecticut
Dist of Col (D.C.)
Delaware
Hawaii
Minnesota
New York
Oregon
Washington

PURPLE STATES – 22

Alaska
Arkansas
Arizona
Illinois
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Massachusetts
Maryland
Maine
Michigan
Missouri
Montana
North Carolina
New Jersey
New Mexico
Nevada
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
Virginia
Wisconsin
West Virginia

RED STATES – 19

Alabama
Florida
Georgia
Iowa
Idaho
Indiana
Mississippi
North Dakota
Nebraska
New Hampshire
Ohio
Oklahoma
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Wyoming

In summary, **10 states are Blue, 22 are Purple, and 19 are Red.**

Using HUD’s **2007–2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) estimates by state** from the **2024 AHAR: Part 1**, I compiled each state’s (and Washington, D.C.’s) homeless counts for **2007** and **2024**.

Note: PIT data is a one-night snapshot and unsheltered counts are hard to measure consistently across communities and over time. The trends are informative, but the numbers aren’t perfect. I then paired those figures with **2007 and 2024 population estimates** from Wikipedia, which compiles Census estimates. ^{1,2,3}

From these two sources, I calculated the **homelessness rate per 10,000 residents** for 2007 and 2024 for every state and D.C., and measured the **percent increase or decrease** in homelessness over the 18-year period.

Let’s use the State of Oregon as an example:

Oregon's Homeless Population Per 10,000 Residents

	2007	2024
Homeless Population	17,590	22,875
State Population	3,747,455	4,272,371
Homeless Pop. Per 10,000 residents	47	54
Change in Percent		14%

Oregon’s homelessness rate rose from **47 per 10,000 residents in 2007** to **54 per 10,000 in 2024**, a **14% increase** over 18 years. I repeated that same calculation for **all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.** Then, to summarize results for **Blue, Purple, and Red** states, I calculated a **population-weighted average rate** for each group (State-by-state calculations and the population-weighted averages are documented in **Appendix A**). Here’s what that means and how it was done:

How the weighted averages were calculated

A simple average would treat **Wyoming and California as equal**, which would distort the results. So instead, for each category (Blue, Purple, Red) and each year (2007 and 2024), I did this:

1. Added up the homeless counts for all states in the category
2. Added up the total population for all states in the category
3. Converted this figure to a rate per 10,000 residents

That gives one clean, apples-to-apples rate for each group in 2007 and 2024. Then I computed the **percent change** over time. Here are the results:

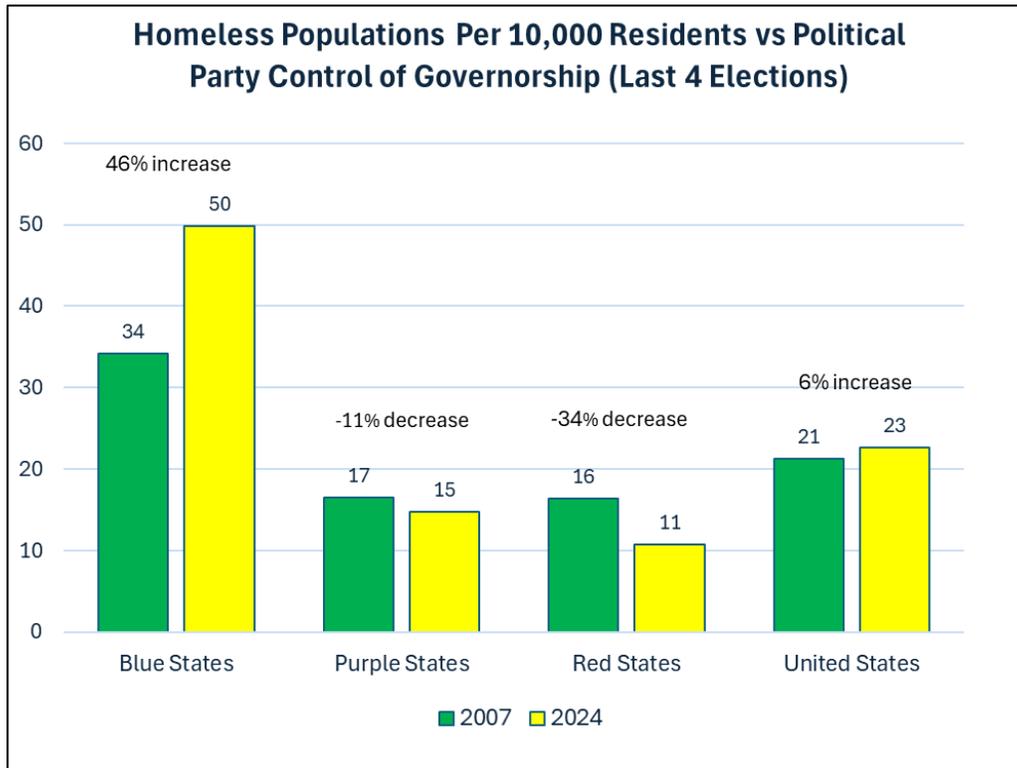
BLUE STATES	2007	2024
Homeless Population	281,037	449,469
State Population	82,364,712	90,155,088
Homeless Pop. Per 10,000 residents	34	50
Change in Percent		46%

PURPLE STATES	2007	2024
Homeless Population	190,530	184,345
State Population	115,212,296	125,255,553
Homeless Pop. Per 10,000 residents	17	15
Change in Percent		-11%

RED STATES	2007	2024
Homeless Population	170,098	134,052
State Population	104,044,149	124,672,786
Homeless Pop. Per 10,000 residents	16	11
Change in Percent		-34%

UNITED STATES	2007	2024
Homeless Population	641,665	767,866
State Population	301,621,157	340,083,427
Homeless Pop. Per 10,000 residents	21	23
Change in Percent		6%

To better summarize, the chart below illustrates the salient points:



What Can We Conclude?

- States with Democratic governors over the last four election cycles have substantially higher homelessness rates per capita—and those rates increased from 2007 to 2024.
- States with Republican governors over the last four election cycles saw an overall decline in homelessness rates per capita over the same period.

Before I go any further, I want to address three predictable objections from readers who may view this analysis as simplistic, biased, or both. On the question of bias, let me be clear: I am not a partisan spokesman. I am not a “closet Republican,” and I’m not carrying water for Democrats either. **I have no party affiliation—my interest is in best practices and measurable outcomes, not party politics.**

Objection #1. Homelessness is primarily a result of high housing costs or high rents.

Yes, Oregon has an affordability problem, and many Blue states include expensive coastal metros where homelessness concentrates.

But high rents don't explain what we see on the ground. Over the past several years, Hope for the Homeless Foundation has interviewed more than sixty executive directors serving the homeless, and their consistent message is that the main drivers are **addiction and untreated mental illness**.

If rent were the primary cause, far more people would solve it the usual way—**roommates, doubling up, renting a room, or staying with family**. The fact that so many remain unsheltered suggests the deeper issue is that many aren't stable enough to live with others or sustain housing without first being stabilized.

Objection #2. Climate explains unsheltered homelessness.

You'll often hear that warmer weather leads to more unsheltered homelessness. Climate may play a role at the margins, but it's clearly not the main driver. If it were, the warmest states—Florida, Texas, and Arizona—would consistently rank at the top. They don't. That tells us weather alone can't explain the wide differences we see; other factors—especially addiction and mental illness, enforcement, and the structure of local services—matter far more.

Objection #3. Correlation isn't causation.

Some will say my blue/red/purple split is **an association**, not proof that the governors' parties *caused* the outcomes. I agree—correlation isn't proof of causation. But it's also not meaningless. When the same pattern shows up across an 18-year period and lines up with long-term one-party control, it's a signal worth investigating. My claim isn't "party proves cause." My claim is "party control is strongly associated with the outcome, and policies differ by party, so it's a reasonable hypothesis that policy choices contribute."

I opened with a simple question: **Does long-term one-party control of a state's governorship affect homelessness?** Based on these results, the answer is yes—at least in terms of the outcomes we can measure.

That immediately raises the more important question: why? The most plausible explanation is that policies matter. Governors set priorities, shape agency leadership, influence budgets, and determine what gets rewarded or tolerated in public systems. When one party holds the governorship for multiple cycles, those choices don't reset every four years—they compound. Over time, that governing philosophy becomes embedded in law, funding, enforcement, and program design—and those long-term decisions can produce long-term consequences.

What policies over the years have been enacted in Oregon that have inadvertently increased homelessness? Here are some of the more egregious:

Policies That Have Unintentionally Increased Homelessness in Oregon

1. Closing Dammasch State Hospital and failing to replace the capacity

The closure of **Dammasch State Hospital in 1995** removed a major piece of Oregon’s inpatient psychiatric infrastructure. At the time, advocates and families warned the state was creating a treatment gap—and those warnings look prophetic. ⁴

Today, Oregon consistently ranks among the worst states on key mental-health metrics (high need, weak access), which leaves too many people with serious mental illness cycling between **street, jail, and ER** instead of sustained care. ⁵

Bottom line: the state reduced institutional capacity without building a replacement system that could keep the sickest Oregonians stabilized and supervised.

2. Weakening vagrancy laws and “handcuffing” local enforcement

During and after COVID, many jurisdictions reduced enforcement of public camping and related ordinances, citing legal uncertainty under **Martin v. Boise** and practical constraints. In **2024**, the U.S. Supreme Court’s **City of Grants Pass v. Johnson** removed the federal Eighth Amendment barrier that Martin had created. ^{6,7}

But in Oregon, even after Grants Pass, cities still face an additional state-law constraint: **ORS 195.530 (HB 3115)** requires that local laws regulating sitting/lying/sleeping/camping on public property be “**objectively reasonable**” as **to time, place, and manner**, and it creates a path for lawsuits and attorney-fee exposure. ⁸

Bottom line: Oregon’s state framework makes it harder for cities to set and enforce basic public-space standards—especially quickly and consistently.

3. Measure 110: decriminalizing hard-drug possession without a working accountability mechanism

Measure 110 shifted most drug possession from a crime to a **Class E violation** with a **\$100 maximum fine**, with the fine waived if the person completed a health assessment. ⁹

In practice, the “citation + hotline” model produced minimal engagement: a state audit found **very low follow-through** (only about **1%** of cited individuals called the

hotline in early implementation), and it criticized implementation and oversight. Meanwhile, overdose deaths climbed during the fentanyl era, and Oregon lawmakers ultimately reversed course with **HB 4002**, which recriminalized possession effective **September 1, 2024** and created a deflection framework that counties may implement unevenly. ^{10,11}

Bottom line: Oregon removed consequences first, while the treatment and deflection infrastructure lagged behind—leaving public drug use and street addiction largely unmanaged.

4. Removing (or shrinking) “treatment-or-jail” leverage by collapsing possession-based drug court pathways

Portland/Multnomah County historically used drug court-style models (including **STOP**) to compel treatment with clear consequences for noncompliance. Those programs were disrupted after Measure 110; county/DA documents explicitly describe STOP Court and Treatment First as closing due to Measure 110, and state materials describe how Multnomah retooled the court because the possession-only pipeline disappeared. (Multnomah County now runs other treatment courts and related programs, but the possession-driven “early intervention with leverage” model took a hit.) ¹²

Nationally, drug courts have substantial evidence behind them: meta-analyses show meaningful reductions in recidivism and improved treatment retention compared with traditional processing. ¹³

Bottom line: Oregon weakened one of the most proven tools for pushing high-risk addicts into treatment *before* they become entrenched, chronically homeless, and repeatedly arrested.

5. The public defender crisis and “accountability collapse” in the misdemeanor pipeline

Oregon’s public defense shortage has had real downstream effects: cases delayed, some dismissed, and court systems strained. Reporting and court decisions describe thousands of defendants without counsel and the resulting disruptions to prosecution and case resolution. ¹⁴

Bottom line: When low-level offenses (often tied to street disorder, addiction, and mental illness) can’t be processed reliably, cities lose one of the few levers they have to require behavior change or treatment engagement. The result is more tolerance of street chaos—and fewer off-ramps for people spiraling into chronic homelessness.

6. Civil commitment thresholds and limited inpatient capacity for the sickest people

Oregon’s civil commitment system has long struggled with when and how the state can intervene for people who are gravely disabled or a danger to themselves/others, and how the system functions after commitment. The courts’ “Commitment to Change” work highlights systemic challenges in Oregon’s civil commitment process.¹⁵

More recently, lawmakers moved to **relax commitment standards** (HB 2005, effective in 2026), which is an implicit acknowledgement that prior standards and processes left too many people outside the reach of intervention until the situation became catastrophic.¹⁶

Bottom line: Without timely intervention and enough psychiatric bed capacity, the most impaired people cycle between street, ER, and jail—never stabilized long enough to remain housed.

CONCLUSION

This analysis does not prove that one political party “causes” homelessness. What it shows—clearly—is that **long-term one-party control of the governorship is strongly associated with markedly different homelessness outcomes**. Over an 18-year span, the states that consistently elected Democratic governors ended up with substantially higher homelessness rates per capita and meaningful increases over time, while states that consistently elected Republican governors saw overall declines.

That pattern should not be waved away. **Governors shape agency leadership, budgets, enforcement priorities, treatment capacity, and the rules that determine whether public systems reward stability or tolerate dysfunction**. When one party holds the governorship for multiple election cycles, those choices compound. Whether the driver is permissive public-space policy, weak accountability in addiction and mental-health systems, the erosion of coercive pathways into treatment, or a failure to maintain inpatient capacity, long-running governance decisions can create long-running consequences.

**“Compassion without accountability is not
compassion—it is neglect.”**

Oregon is a cautionary example. For decades we have made policy choices that reduced the state’s ability to stabilize people with severe mental illness and addiction, weakened the leverage that used to push high-risk individuals into treatment, and made it harder to enforce basic standards of public order.

The predictable result is **more people living and dying on the street.**

The path forward is not maintaining the status quo. It is a reset toward measurable outcomes: restore treatment capacity (including secure and inpatient options), rebuild accountability tools that compel engagement when necessary, and reestablish public-space standards that protect both the public and the people trapped in street addiction and psychiatric crisis.

Compassion without accountability is not compassion—it is neglect.

NEXT STEPS

This paper is intended to start a serious conversation—one grounded in outcomes, not good intentions. Here’s what needs to happen next:

- 1. Pressure-test the analysis.**

If you see an error in the data, the categorization (Blue/Purple/Red), the weighting method, or the interpretation, call it out—specifically. Offer corrections, alternate explanations, or additional variables worth testing. The goal isn’t to “win” an argument; it’s to sharpen the analysis until it reflects reality as accurately as possible.

- 2. Identify which policy choices are driving the outcomes—and change them.**

If the trends hold up, the next step is not more debate about party labels. It’s to isolate the policies that most plausibly reduce chronic street homelessness—and then implement those policies. Until we are willing to name the governing assumptions behind those policies and measure results honestly, Oregon will continue to spend more and get worse outcomes.

FOOTNOTES

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***Doug Marshall**, a native Portlander, has dedicated over 30 years to addressing homelessness in his community. In 2019, he founded **Hope for the Homeless Foundation**, an organization committed to objectively measuring the effectiveness of nonprofits in helping the homeless return to stability and become housed. By identifying and funding organizations with a proven track record of success, his foundation ensures that resources go directly to initiatives that make a lasting impact.*

Appendix A - Data Workbook

Homelessness Rates vs Political Party Control of Governorship (Last 4 Elections)

Impact of Party in Power on Homeless Population (updated Feb. 2026). Includes: HUD PIT counts (2007 & 2024), population estimates, per-10,000 rates, and population-weighted Blue/Purple/Red averages.

	2007 H POP	2024 H POP	2007 ST POP	2024 ST POP	2007 H P per 10,000	2024 H P per 10,000	Change in Percent
BLUE STATES							
California	138,986	187,084	36,553,215	39,431,263	38	47	25%
Colorado	14,225	18,715	4,861,515	5,957,493	29	31	7%
Connecticut	4,482	3,410	3,502,309	3,675,069	13	9	-27%
Dist of Col (D.C.)	5,320	5,616	588,292	702,250	90	80	-12%
Delaware	1,061	1,358	864,764	1,051,917	12	13	5%
Hawaii	6,070	11,637	1,283,388	1,446,146	47	80	70%
Minnesota	7,323	9,201	5,197,621	5,793,151	14	16	13%
New York	62,601	158,019	19,297,729	19,867,248	32	80	145%
Oregon	17,590	22,875	3,747,455	4,272,371	47	54	14%
Washington	23,379	31,554	6,468,424	7,958,180	36	40	10%
	281,037	449,469	82,364,712	90,155,088	34	50	46%
PURPLE STATES							
Alaska	1,642	2,686	683,478	740,133	24	36	51%
Arkansas	3,836	2,783	2,834,797	3,088,354	14	9	-33%
Arizona	14,646	14,737	6,338,755	7,582,384	23	19	-16%
Illinois	15,487	25,832	12,852,548	12,710,158	12	20	69%
Kansas	2,111	2,793	2,775,997	2,943,045	8	9	25%
Kentucky	8,061	5,231	4,241,474	4,588,372	19	11	-40%
Louisiana	5,494	3,469	4,293,204	4,597,740	13	8	-41%
Massachusetts	15,127	29,360	6,449,755	7,136,171	23	41	75%
Maryland	9,628	6,069	5,618,344	6,263,220	17	10	-43%
Maine	2,638	2,702	1,317,207	1,405,012	20	19	-4%
Michigan	28,295	9,739	10,071,822	10,140,459	28	10	-66%
Missouri	6,247	7,312	5,878,415	6,245,466	11	12	10%
Montana	1,150	2,008	957,861	1,137,233	12	18	47%
North Carolina	11,802	11,626	9,061,032	11,046,024	13	11	-19%
New Jersey	17,314	12,762	8,685,920	9,500,851	20	13	-33%
New Mexico	3,015	4,631	1,969,915	2,130,256	15	22	42%
Nevada	8,642	10,106	2,565,382	3,267,467	34	31	-8%
Pennsylvania	16,220	14,088	12,432,792	13,078,751	13	11	-17%
Rhode Island	1,372	2,442	1,057,832	1,112,308	13	22	69%
Virginia	9,746	7,141	7,712,091	8,811,195	13	8	-36%
Wisconsin	5,648	5,049	5,601,640	5,960,975	10	8	-16%
West Virginia	2,409	1,779	1,812,035	1,769,979	13	10	-24%
	190,530	184,345	115,212,296	125,255,553	17	15	-11%
RED STATES							
Alabama	5,452	4,601	4,627,851	5,157,699	12	9	-24%
Florida	48,069	31,362	18,251,243	23,372,215	26	13	-49%

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Impact of Party in Power on Homeless Population (updated Feb. 2026). Includes: HUD PIT counts (2007 & 2024), population estimates, per-10,000 rates, and population-weighted Blue/Purple/Red averages.

	2007 H POP	2024 H POP	2007 ST POP	2024 ST POP	2007 H P per 10,000	2024 H P per 10,000	Change in Percent
Georgia	19,639	12,290	9,544,750	11,180,878	21	11	-47%
Iowa	2,734	2,631	2,988,046	3,241,488	9	8	-11%
Idaho	1,749	2,750	1,499,402	2,001,619	12	14	18%
Indiana	7,358	6,285	6,345,289	6,924,275	12	9	-22%
Mississippi	1,377	1,041	2,918,785	2,943,045	5	4	-25%
North Dakota	636	865	639,715	796,568	10	11	9%
Nebraska	3,531	2,720	1,774,571	2,005,465	20	14	-32%
New Hampshire	2,248	2,245	1,315,828	1,409,032	17	16	-7%
Ohio	11,264	11,759	11,466,917	11,883,304	10	10	1%
Oklahoma	4,221	5,467	3,617,316	4,095,393	12	13	14%
South Carolina	5,660	4,593	4,407,709	5,478,831	13	8	-35%
South Dakota	579	1,338	796,214	924,669	7	14	99%
Tennessee	11,210	8,290	6,156,719	7,227,750	18	11	-37%
Texas	39,788	27,987	23,904,380	31,290,831	17	9	-46%
Utah	3,011	3,869	2,645,330	3,503,613	11	11	-3%
Vermont	1,035	3,458	621,254	648,493	17	53	220%
Wyoming	537	501	522,830	587,618	10	9	-17%
	170,098	134,052	104,044,149	124,672,786	16	11	-34%
TOTAL	641,665	767,866	301,621,157	340,083,427	21	23	6%

2007 - 2024 Point-in-Time Estimates by State, 2024 AHAR: Part 1 -PIT Homelessness in the U.S.

List of U.S. states by population, Wikipedia, https://peshkin.mech.northwestern.edu/longlines/sourcedata/Wikipedia_population.pdf, 11/7/2008

List of U.S. states and territories by population 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_population